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SUBJECT: KUWAITI SOCCER CLUB BRAVES MATCH IN IRAQ

REF: A. KUWAIT 562
[B](#). KUWAIT 948

[1](#). (U) In an overture aimed at warming the bilateral relationship, Kuwait's "Al Kuwait Kaifan" soccer club traveled to Erbil, Iraq, for a September 30 tournament game, the first time a Kuwaiti team has traveled to Iraq in two decades. Accompanying the team were prominent Kuwaiti MPs Marzouq Al-Ghanem and Walid Al-Tabtabaie, who delivered a letter of friendship to KRG President Barzani from Kuwaiti Parliament Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi (Note: Al-Ghanem is the club chairman and Al-Tabtabaie is on the club board. End note.) Al-Ghanem, who has used his prominence in parliament to argue for strong ties with Iraq (Ref A), told the Iraqi press that he felt sports cooperation was a key "cementing" factor in the bilateral relationship (for Al-Ghanem bio notes, see Ref B).

[2](#). (U) Al Kuwait Kaifan is the first team worldwide to brave Iraq-hosted matches since the Asian Football Confederation deemed the country insufficiently safe to host international play in 2003. Earlier in the tournament, the Lebanese and Omani soccer clubs deferred travel to Iraq for their matches with the Erbil team, obligating the Erbil players to host their "home" games in Jordan.

[3](#). (U) At the sold-out match, Iraqi fans held up a large banner reading "We welcome Al-Kuwait sports club to the Kurdistan region. We do not care if we win or lose -- the ultimate aim is our friendship." The Kuwaiti team won 1-0.

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